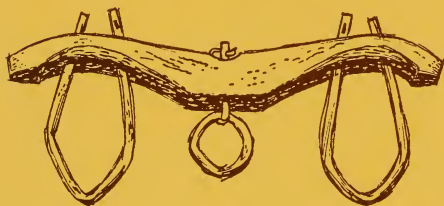


973.7L63
B4Ev18

Evans, Henry Oliver

Lincoln as he lived Religion

LINCOLN ROOM
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
LIBRARY



MEMORIAL
the Class of 1901

founded by
HARLAN HOYT HORNER
and
HENRIETTA CALHOUN HORNER

LINCOLN

•§ *As he lived Religion*

APRIL, 1928

ADDRESS BY
HENRY OLIVER EVANS, ESQ.

Mr. Evans is one of the outstanding students of Lincoln. Some time ago he delivered an address on Lincoln the Lawyer, before the Hungry Club of Pittsburgh, Pa. This brought a request for an address on Lincoln and Religion.

Count Tolstoi considered Lincoln as the one Real Giant in Modern History. He said: "Lincoln was a saint in Humanity; he was not a great general like Washington or Napoleon, nor a skillful statesman like Gladstone or Frederick the Great, but his supremacy expressed itself in his peculiar moral power and in the greatness of his character."

It seems to the writer this address on Lincoln is peculiarly fitting for distribution by the Caddie Welfare Committee, as character building is our chief aim.

EDWARD E. MCCOY
Chairman
CADDIE WELFARE COMMITTEE
U. P. G. A.

Lincoln—As he lived Religion



FEW characters live in history uncircumscribed by time or place. They may have died 10 centuries ago and yet we feel them as modern as ourselves. One hundred nineteen years ago such a man was born in a log cabin on the Kentucky frontier. Emerson said, "Abraham Lincoln exemplified the true history of the American people to his time; the pulse of 20 millions throbbing through his heart, the thoughts of their minds made articulate by his tongue."

Walt Whitman said that the Greeks would have made a god out of Lincoln; Emerson, that if he had lived before the day of Gutenberg, Lincoln would have become mythological like Aesop; Ingersoll, that he was the gentlest memory in the world.

The life of no character in history, save Christ, has been so minutely studied and every facet of his many-sided career is supremely interesting, but none more so than his relation to the churches, religion and spiritual life.

It would be well, perhaps, to refresh our recollections as to the main events of Lincoln's life, especially such as afford a background for this question.

He was born February 12, 1809, that fruitful year in which were born Gladstone and Darwin. Kentucky was on the frontier then, with primitive, frontier conditions in every aspect of life, in church as well as school, both of which were intermittent, supplied by itinerants, sometimes far apart in time.

When Lincoln was seven, the family migrated to Indiana, to even simpler conditions, where two years later, Lincoln's mother, Nancy Hanks, died. It was many months before the family was

able to obtain a minister to conduct services over her grave.

Here Lincoln went to school a little—his entire school life, under five teachers, spread over twelve years, was less than one year—but most of his study was self-conducted at the encouragement of his second mother, Sarah Bush, whom his father had married three years after coming to Indiana. Here he heard an occasional itinerant preacher and attended a number of emotional revival services.

He worked hard. His father, he said, had “raised him to physical work but not to like it.” He split 300 fence rails for each yard of linsey-woolsey with which to make a pair of trousers. He pulled fodder for three days to pay for a borrowed book which had been spoiled by rain. He went, as a hired man, to New Orleans on a flat-boat, walking home. He ferried passengers over the Ohio River in a skiff he built and thus came to manhood.

When he was 21, the family moved again to Illinois, where, after they were settled, Lincoln left to make his own way in the world. He made another trip on a flat-boat to New Orleans, in which he is said to have been so affected by the cruelties of slavery that he vowed "to smash it." He acted as a clerk in a store, then became Captain in the Black Hawk War, where, as he said, "he fought, bled (from mosquito bites) and came away," and ran unsuccessfully for the Legislature.

On his return from the wars, he engaged in an ill-fated attempt to corner all the store business in New Salem by becoming a partner with Berry in three stores. The firm failed, "winked out," as he said, leaving him with what he called "his National Debt" of \$1500.00, which took him 15 years to pay off, principal and interest. He acted as postmaster, deputy surveyor and began to study law,

and was elected for the first of four terms to the Legislature.

If one were to divide, roughly, Lincoln's spiritual life into periods, this may be said to be the end of the first period of preparation. Here Lincoln had his first love affair with Ann Rutledge and on her death plunged into that slough of despond which undoubtedly affected all his life subsequently. He was admitted to the practice of law at 28, and began that slow but sure climb which—in 24 years—placed him in a position of leadership in a strong and notable bar, the end of his second period, growth.

At 32, he married Mary Todd. He had devoted about as much time to politics as to law until his return from Congress in 1848, but for the next six years he devoted himself assiduously to the jealous mistress, the law, until he was roused by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and plunged into his contest with

Stephen A. Douglas which led to the famous debates in 1858, then the famous Cooper Union speech and the Presidency.

The most reticent and uncommunicative of men as to his inner life, purposes and thoughts, we are not surprised to find that there is comparatively little authentic *direct* evidence, and that the opinions of the witnesses are colored by their individual predilections and prejudices.

“Seven Grecian cities strove for Homer
dead

Through which the living Homer begged
for bread.”

—and we find many churches claiming Lincoln as a member, but the one certain fact in evidence is that he was never formally affiliated with any religious organization, although he was a fairly constant attendant, after his marriage, of the Springfield congregation and was a regular attendant of the morning services, as well as of the mid-week prayer meetings

of the New York Avenue Presbyterian church at Washington.

Lincoln's spiritual life was, as were all the other sides of his life, a process of development. His father was a Predestinarian Baptist and infrequent as may have been his opportunities for receiving doctrinal teaching during his years in Kentucky and Indiana before his majority, the, to us, harsh doctrines of that stern discipline made an impress upon Lincoln which was never entirely erased. Sunday schools were unknown and later on were vigorously opposed when first introduced. Lincoln, even as a youth, knew that the world was round which few of the pioneer preachers he heard would have acknowledged.

His mother was highly intellectual, of strong memory and acute judgment and his step-mother was a constant Bible reader and Lincoln later cherished and constantly read her Bible. It is certain that Lincoln read the Bible over and over

again—whole chapters of Isaiah, Psalms, the historical books and New Testament were in his memory, and he would correct misquotation, giving chapter and verse.

When he came to Illinois he fell in with a company of young people affected by the loose-thinking which often characterizes youth. There he read Volney's *Ruins* and Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* and is said by some to have become an "infidel." Those who expressed this opinion considered themselves "infidels" and yet, the principal witness thus states his own religion. "The highest thoughts and acts of the human soul and its religious sphere are to think, love, obey and worship God, by thinking freely, by loving, teaching, doing good and elevating mankind. My first duty is to God, then to mankind, and then to the individual man or woman."

Lincoln was a Calvinist but he rebelled at the doctrine then widely preached that

some men were capriciously predestined—without, and in spite of, any act of theirs—to endless punishment. He believed in future punishment — but not *endless* punishment. Later on, he said, “When any church will inscribe over its altar as its sole qualification for membership the Savior’s condensed statement of the substance of both the law and the Gospel—Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind and thy neighbor as thyself—that church I will join with all my heart and soul.”

Lincoln quoted, “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,” as meaning *not* individual election and particular salvation and damnation but universal salvation, after punishment, repentance and growth.

When we consider this question we must remember the thoughts and habits of the people among whom Lincoln lived from 1840 to 1860, in many respects not

unlike those in Dayton, Tennessee, today. Theological teaching was over-emphasized; public controversy and debate over dogma was universal, and these contests were fierce and personal. One who did not conform to the community opinion was outside the pale. This was not the "mauve decade"; black was black and white was white—and there were no grays or intervening shades.

We have come to see, today, that we are saved by faith and works and not by knowledge of theological dogmas and statements. No men who held such views as I have outlined would be considered "infidels" by us.

Perhaps one reason for Lincoln's reticence in expression of his religious views was his experience in the mixture of politics and religion. He was twice opposed as a candidate by a famous Methodist itinerant minister or evangelist, Peter Cartwright. The fight against Lincoln was based on two accusations, that he

was an aristocrat and a deist. We may well conclude that he was as innocent of one charge as the other, although he refused to discuss the latter, saying, "I am not going to discuss the religion and character of Jesus Christ on the political stump."

When he came to Springfield he read and digested Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of Creation*, the first book to connect the natural sciences with the history of creation, showing an evolutionary theory consistent with faith in God and the Bible. There he met and became a friend and admirer of Reverend James Smith, a stalwart, learned Presbyterian minister and by study of his book, *The Christian's Defense*, became firmly convinced that the proof of the divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures was unanswerable. He said to his friend, Speed, "Take all of the Bible upon reason you can and the balance on faith and you will live and die a happier man." He

said to a group of colored men who presented him a Bible, "In regard to the Great Book, I have only to say, it is the best gift which God has ever given man. All the good from the Savior of the world is communicated to us through this book."

In Springfield he experienced the loss of his first son and this sorrow, added to the sense of responsibility and call by God to save the Union, culminated, after the death of his second son in Washington, in what he called a "crystallization" which we may regard as the last period of his spiritual growth.

Lincoln copied, in Washington, a paragraph from Baxter's *Saint's Rest*:

"We have faith given us, principally that we might believe and live in it in daily applications of Christ. You may believe immediately (by God's help) but getting assurance of it may be the work of a great part of your life."

a graphic statement of the slow progress, unseen to others and perhaps to himself, in his growth to full fruition. As Paul expresses it, "The first man is of the earth, earthy and the second man is from heaven. First is that which is natural and afterwards that which is spiritual."

What are the outlines of his spiritual beliefs which emerge from this growth as shown by Lincoln's words and acts?

After Vicksburg and Gettysburg, he said,

"I do most sincerely thank Almighty God for this occasion. I especially desire that on this day He, whose will, not ours, should ever be done, be everywhere remembered and revered with profoundest gratitude."

After his issue of the Emancipation Proclamation, he said,

"I can only trust in God that I have made no mistake. It is my ear-

nest desire to know the will of Providence in this matter."

In his last public speech, after peace was declared and three days before his death, he said,

"In the midst of rejoicings, however, He from whom all blessings flow, must not be forgotten. If God now wills the removal of a great wrong and wills also that we of the North, as well as you of the South, shall pay fairly for our complicity in that wrong, impartial history will find therein new causes to attest and revere the justice and goodness of God."

He wrote for his own use a *Meditation on the Divine Will* which he begins as follows:

"The will of God prevails."

On the night of his second election, he said, "I give thanks to Almighty God for this evidence of the people's resolution." Lincoln used Bible illustrations in a prac-

tical way. When it was urged that applicants for office should swear they had not participated in the Civil war he said, "On principle, I dislike an oath which requires a man to swear he has not done wrong. It rejects the Christian principle of forgiveness of sins on terms of repentance. I think it is enough if the man does no wrong thereafter." When considering a desertion case, he said, "Did you say this boy was once badly wounded? Then since the Scriptures say that in the shedding of blood is remission of sins, I guess we will have to let him off."

Even his political speeches and private letters abound in scriptural references such as to the washing of the robes in blood—"If they heed not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead",—"They seek a sign and no sign shall be given them,"—"The gates of Hell shall not prevail against thee"—"There is a time to

keep silence"—"Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord."

The foundation stone of his celebrated debate with Douglas which made him the President was that never-to-be-forgotten quotation, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." The sound diction of the King James version and the cadence of the Bible phrases sound the undertone in his great Second Inaugural:

"Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled up by the bond-man's 200 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid with another drawn with the sword, as was said 3,000 years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether'."

Lincoln had an intimate knowledge of

the Bible stories and habitually used them but never in a mawkish way. Lincoln was greatly bothered by Radicals who desired him to free the slaves. While he, himself, abhorred slavery, as a great lawyer he had a strong sense of the rights of property and preferred emancipation only after compensation, until, as a war measure only, he became convinced that emancipation without compensation was necessary and unavoidable.

Three members of Congress, Sumner, Wilson and Thad Stevens of our own state were especially importunate and persistent. Several months before he had decided that the hour was come and therefore issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln was discussing this constant and acute pressure with a friend and walked to a window looking out over Pennsylvania avenue, where he stood looking out in an attitude of sadness and depression. Suddenly, he turned with a smile and twinkling eyes and said:

“When I was a boy at school reading books and grammars were unknown and all our reading was done from the Scriptures. We stood up in a great circle and each read, in succession, a verse from some chapter. One day we had the story of the faithful Israelites who were thrown into the fiery furnace and thence delivered by the Lord without so much as the smell of fire upon their garments. It fell to one little boy to read the verse in which occurred, for the first time in the chapter, the names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Little Bud stumbled on Shadrach, floundered on Mesach and went all to pieces on Abednego, bursting into tears, then into sniffles but finally became quiet. His blunder had been forgotten until, when his turn to read was approaching again, he set up a wail and, pointing to the verse he must read, he said, “Look there, teacher, there comes them three suckers agin!”

With his whole face lighted up with

a smile, Lincoln led his friend to the window and pointed with his long, bony finger to three figures approaching the White House. They were Sumner, Wilson and Stevens!

When malcontent Republicans nominated Fremont, for Lincoln's second term at their poorly attended Cleveland convention, he picked up the Bible which habitually lay on his desk and turned the leaves to the account of David's army when, as an outlaw, he fled from Saul's fury, as found in I Samuel 22:2 and read, "And everyone that was discontented gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them and there were with him about 400 men."

When he was remonstrated with for giving office to one who had opposed him, he said, "I think I have Scriptural authority for appointing him. You remember when the Lord was on Mount Sinai getting out a commission for Aaron, that same Aaron was at the foot

of the mountain, making a false god for the people to worship. Yet Aaron got his commission!"

In his debate with Douglas he used Paul before Agrippa as an illustration and when complaint was made as to Stanton he said, "Go home, my friend, and read attentively the 10th verse of the 30th chapter of Proverbs, 'Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee and thou be found guilty'."

At the cabinet meeting held on the last morning of his life he spoke in a most friendly manner of the Southerners, said he wouldn't agree to hanging even the worst of them, and ended, "Too many lives have already been sacrificed. Anger must be put aside." He said, "I have not willingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom. We must not sully victory with harshness."

On the way from Richmond after the declaration of peace, when it was suggested that Jeff Davis deserved to be

hanged, Lincoln said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," and taking a little worn Macbeth from his pocket he read twice over,

"Duncan is in his grave.

After life's fitful fever he sleeps
well;

Treason has done its worst; not steel
nor poison,

Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing

Can touch him further."

The last official action of his life was endorsing "Let it be done" on the petition of a Confederate to take the oath of allegiance. The last Act of Congress he signed was one requiring the motto, "In God we Trust" upon our coins. By Presidential Order he decreed Sabbath Observance and said, "The sacred rights of Christian soldiers and sailors, a becoming deference to the best sentiments of a Christian people, and a due regard for the Divine will demand that Sunday la-

bor in the Army and Navy be reduced to the measure of strict necessity.”

Lincoln had faith in and practiced prayer, not only as a means of obtaining results from God but also, as establishing a covenant relation with God. When he first presented the Emancipation Proclamation to the Cabinet on July 22, 1862, they practically voted it down. When, on September 22nd, he again presented it, he said it was for discussion of its terms only, since he had promised his Maker that if Lee was driven out of Maryland and Pennsylvania, he would free the slaves. He prayed for victory at Gettysburg and when news of Lee's surrender reached the Cabinet meeting it was at the suggestion of Lincoln that all dropped to their knees and offered their thanks to God. He said, “I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. However I might be misapprehended by men, I am glad to

know that no thought or intent of mine escapes the observation of that Judge by whose decree I expect to stand or fall in this world or the next." "The only ruler I have is my conscience, following God in it." He implored His assistance in his letter of acceptance of the nomination to the Presidency.

Lincoln's religion was always practical. In this, as in other things, he brushed aside formalism. To a minister who said, "Let us have faith, Mr. President, that the Lord is on our side," he said, "I am not at all concerned about that, for I know that the Lord is always on the side of the right; but it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation may be on the Lord's side." He abhorred intolerance and risked political defeat by denouncing the equivalent of our Ku Klux Klan. He said, "God bless the Methodist Church—bless all the churches—and blessed be God who in this, our great trial, giveth us the churches."

Lincoln believed in conscious communion with an almighty, mysterious, beneficent Power concerning itself not less with human affairs than with the march of the seasons and the sweep of the constellations. It has been said that God was not, to him, a personal God. I do not believe this. This is a popular, a fashionable belief, especially today. A study of Lincoln's words and acts will, I am convinced, lead one to the inevitable conclusion that God was to him, a person, his Heavenly Father. God to him was an ever-present, ever-regnant influence. Belief in God was a challenge to singleness of purpose. He would lift up to the All-Pure clean hands and a pure heart. He believed he was called by God to a great task. He quoted often,

“There's a divinity that shapes our
ends,

Rough-hew them how we will.”

Lincoln believed in Immortality, he believed in the Brotherhood of Man; he be-

lieved in the Fatherhood of God. This was nowhere more beautifully or more touchingly illustrated than in that simple but matchless farewell address to his neighbors when he left Springfield for Washington—never to return—

“I now leave, not knowing when or whether I ever may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him, who can go with me and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.”

A very interesting and significant expression of this dependence, as it seems to me, is shown by a study of the famous

Gettysburg address. There is a widespread impression that this was hastily composed on the train from Washington to Gettysburg. There are two objections, at least, to this mistaken idea; first, the fact that it was Lincoln's habit to prepare carefully, even unimportant speeches, such as responses to groups of serenaders. Although Edward Everett was expected to make the main address, which, in fact, covered three hours, it is hardly conceivable that Lincoln did not consider this an important address.

The second objection is that the address was carefully prepared in Washington, was shown there to members of the Cabinet and by one competent judge, who read both speeches there, it was said, before Lincoln left Washington, that Lincoln had said more in 40 lines than Everett in three hours.

The significant thing is that, although composed, except for trifling verbal changes, in Washington, reviewed on the

train and again the night before in Gettysburg, yet, in the heat of delivery, when his soul was fired by the sights and thoughts surrounding this turning point in the Rebellion, Lincoln added, extemporaneously and from the depths of his inner nature, the words "*under God*" in the final phrase "that we highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Nicolay knew Lincoln intimately, in years of terrible stress, and said,

"He had faith in the eternal justice and boundless mercy of Providence and made the Golden Rule of Christ his practical creed."

John Hay called him "the greatest character since Christ." Of him we may well use the language of James 3:17:

"First pure, then peacable, gentle

and easy to be entreated, full of mercy, and, good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

Lincoln has been called a Christian without a creed." In the sense that he neither subscribed to nor definitely formulated his creed, this is true but Doctor Barton, author of many authoritative and interesting books on Lincoln, has, from Lincoln's own words, stated his creed as follows:

"I believe in God, the Almighty Ruler of Nations, our great and good and merciful Maker, our Father in Heaven who notes the fall of a sparrow, and numbers the hairs of our heads.

I believe in His eternal truth and justice.

I recognize the sublime truth announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history that those nations only are blest whose God is the Lord.

I believe that it is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, and to invoke the influence of His Holy Spirit; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon.

I believe that it is meet and right to recognize and confess the presence of the Almighty Father equally in our triumphs and in those sorrows which we may justly fear are a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins to the needful end of our reformation.

I believe that the Bible is the best gift which God has ever given to men. All the good from the Saviour of the world is communicated to us through this book.

I believe the will of God prevails. Without Him all human reli-

ance is vain. Without the assistance of that Divine Being, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail.

Being a humble instrument in the hands of our Heavenly Father, I desire that all my works and acts may be according to his will; and that it may be so, I give thanks to the Almighty, and seek His aid.

I have a solemn oath registered in heaven to finish the work I am in, in full view of my responsibility to my God, with malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right as God gives me to see the right. Commending those who love me to His care, as I hope in their prayers they will commend me, I look through the help of God to a joyous meeting with many loved ones gone before."

Richard Watson Gilder has given us a beautiful expression of our universal feeling towards Lincoln:

ON THE LIFE-MASK OF
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

“This bronze doth keep the very form
and mold
Of our great martyr’s face. Yes, this
is he;
That brow all wisdom, all benignity;
That human, humorous mouth; those
cheeks that hold
Like some harsh landscape all the sum-
mer’s gold;
That spirit fit for sorrow, as the sea
For storms to beat on; the lone agony
Those silent, patient lips too well fore-
told.
Yes, this is he who ruled a world of men
As might some prophet of the older
day—
Brooding above the tempest and the
fray
With deep-eyed thought and more
than mortal ken.
A power was his beyond the touch of
art
Or armed strength — his pure and
mighty heart.”

Published by
CADDIE WELFARE COMMITTEE
of the
WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA GOLF ASSOCIATION

ORMISTON-DOYLE Co.
PRINTERS
GOLF SPECIALTIES
632 Duquesne Way
PITTSBURGH



PRINTED IN U. S. A.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA

973.7L63B4EV1L

C001

LINCOLN AS HE LIVED RELIGION. PITTSBURGH



3 0112 031798181